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NEWS CONFERENCE

#178

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 9:20 A.M. PDT

MARCH 30, 1975

SUNDAY

(Palm Springs, California)

MR. NESSEN: A number of people have asked me about Da Nang and Presidential reaction to Da Nang.

I really don't have anything to give you because the information is very, very sketchy from the point of being virtually nonexistent.

There are no Americans left, so there is just very slim information that the President is getting about the situation. He is getting information from Washington. We have been in touch with Washington this morning. Let's wait until after church and see if we have anything more.

The question has been raised about whether the sea evacuation will go on. It is just not possible to determine that here. You need to talk to the Navy in Washington, the AID agency, and the State Department. I just simply do not have anything.

Q Ron, could you give us a little of the mechanics of how the President is being kept informed; who is talking with him here?

MR. NESSEN: By teletype and by telephone.

Q With whom.

MR. NESSEN: The NSC.

Q Has he talked to Kissinger lately?

MR. NESSEN: I have, and I assume he has.

Q What does Kissinger say, pray tell? What does he say, really? It is his peace that is falling apart.

MR. NESSEN: He is in the same situation. He does not have very much information.

MORE

#178

Q Is there any chance that he will come out here earlier than expected?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q When is he expected?

MR. NESSEN: He just said on the phone he thought he would be coming out here Thursday night or Friday.

Q Ron, is there direct contact between the President and General Weyand?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware of any.

Q Well, is there any contact between the U.S. and the Saigon government? The Saigon government knows what happened in Da Nang, doesn't it?

MR. NESSEN: I saw a story saying the officials had announced the fall of Da Nang. That is their announcement from Saigon.

Q Can you confirm the fall from your own sources?

MR. NESSEN: There are no American sources.

Q Well, Saigon sources.

MR. NESSEN: There are no Americans in Da Nang.

Q Have your people in Saigon been able to confirm that it has fallen?

MR. NESSEN: Whatever the South Vietnamese government is saying is what the Americans know in Saigon.

Q Ron, will the President be talking to General Weyand today?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that.

MORE

Q Ron at least in the press corps I think there is a general mood of concern and drama to this whole thing. Can you characterize what the feeling is of the President? Has he said anything?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, again I know the situation has changed a bit, but in planning the policy and the legal implications of the possible evacuation or the evacuation program the President has authorized, what did he decide should be done should any American ships come under fire.

I know your plan is for them not to come under fire, but what are his orders, or what are his thoughts if any of the American forces there come under fire? Would it be to pull back and just get away from the area of conflict, or what?

MR. NESSEN: Pull back and get away from the area.

Q It would not be to engage in defensive counterattack?

MR. NESSEN: The plan would be to avoid hostilities and withdraw, and if they came under hostilities, to withdraw.

Q Ron, there is a Chicago Tribune report that the President has asked Secretary Kissinger to stay on until early 1977.

MR. NESSEN: In a recent conversation between the President and the Secretary, the President expressed his desire for Secretary Kissinger to stay on at least until the end of this term, and that Secretary Kissinger said this was his desire, too.

Q Is he going to play golf?

MR. NESSEN: Today?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: That is the plan.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: Approximately 1:30. The protective travel pool will go back to the house with the President from church, and Larry will go with them. Larry will check on what time the golf game is, and if it is almost immediate, the protective pool will stay there and go directly to the golf course gates from the residence. If there is going to be a long delay, the travel pool will come back here and then go back out to the golf course.

Q Is there a chance for pictures of the President's Residence for those of us who have to get film back East?

MR. NESSEN: I believe somebody said the protective travel pool was going to take some this morning when he departs from the Residence for church.

Q They are going to be able to get some?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, exterior.

Q Ron, is there any social event this evening?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen tonight's schedule. Sheila Weidenfeld says she does not expect a social event tonight.

Q Does not?

MR. NESSEN: Does not, but we will check later in the day.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 9:32 A.M. PDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 1:26 P.M. PDT

MARCH 30, 1975

SUNDAY

(Palm Springs, California)

MR. NESSEN: Let me run through one or two things quickly.

Secretary Bowers will be on the trip tomorrow to Elk Hills and will be able to answer your detailed questions after you have seen the situation on the ground.

The President is playing golf this afternoon at La Quinta Golf Course. The foursome is made up of the President, the former Army football coach and friend of the President, Red Blaik, and Leon Parma, who I think you know of. He is a businessman from La Jolla. The fourth is Frank Capra, a Hollywood director.

That is today. The protective pool has gone over to La Quinta to see them.

The President will play golf tomorrow when he returns from Elk Hills, and that will be the day for open coverage of golf. We will wait until everybody gets back from Elk Hills and then go out to the golf course.

I am not sure which course he is playing on tomorrow, but I am told the course is laid out in such a way that wherever he is on the course, he is easy to find, so we will pick him up at whatever point he is when we all get back from Elk Hills. We will follow him for three or four holes and take all the pictures you want and then that will be the golf for the week.

Q Is that the same foursome?

MORE

#179

MR. NESSEN: I don't know who the foursome is tomorrow. I don't think so.

The President and Mrs. Ford will have a dinner privately at their rented house tonight. They will not be going out.

Tomorrow the President has invited Governor and Mrs. Reagan to have dinner with them at the house. Governor Reagan will be arriving at the airport here at 7:30 tomorrow night.

To give you a little background on this, the President invited Governor Reagan to this dinner. Last summer the President had a trip to California planned, at which Governor Reagan had invited him to a number of social events. That trip had to be cancelled after he became President, and so this is kind of a raincheck for the social events they did not get to have last summer. That will be a private dinner just the two couples.

That is basically the news of the day. I think we could clamp a lid on now.

Q Ron, what can you tell us about the Presidential reaction to the events in South Vietnam?

MR. NESSEN: You could say that the President considers the fall of Da Nang to be an immense human tragedy. It has cruelly trapped many hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese refugees who tried until the last moment to escape the North Vietnamese army. It should be deeply disturbing to all civilized mankind.

Q Is that a quote?

MR. NESSEN: I am just passing on to you the President's thoughts on the fall of Da Nang.

MORE

Q ~~That~~ is not necessarily direct quotes?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think you can say I said this in reflecting the President's views.

Q Ron, were you finished on that one?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Can you tell us, did he talk to Secretary Kissinger this morning?

MR. NESSEN: I am still not sure of that, Phil.

Q Ron, it sounds like the evacuation has ended. Is that the way you mean it?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, it is not possible to say that from here. I read a UPI or an AP story from Washington saying that the evacuation is, and would, go on from other points along the coast, and from people who can still get away from Da Nang and who may already be at sea.

Q Have you received any reports at all of any altercations, or anything, attacks on U.S. ships?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen any, no.

Q Whose decision is that, Ron, whether they proceed, the local commanders of those ships or how high up does it go?

MR. NESSEN: The President, as you know, ordered this evacuation plan last night, and it is going forward.

Q Is his summation still slim and sketchy?

MR. NESSEN: Very much so.

Q So, it is his desire right now that it go forward?

MR. NESSEN: How about those four countries that indicated their willingness to participate?

MR. NESSEN: The wire services have the names of the ships and the locations of the ships, and they are also going forward. In fact, some of the ships -- again based on the wires -- have already picked up refugees.

Q Ron, is the President deeply concerned with the news that at least 200 of the crack South Vietnamese troops have just left the battle --

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that, Phil.

Q If these evacuation plans continue in the Da Nang area, would these ships be picking up troops like the troops that came upon the planes or would they only be picking up the people who are stranded?

MR. NESSEN: Mr. Parker, in Washington, is coordinating the effort. The Navy is providing the ships. I suggest you ask them the mechanics of how the operation will run.

MORE

Q Has the President been swimming at all?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Ron, the local paper today described that house as being a \$355,000 house. Do you know if that is accurate?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea.

Q Can you give us any kind of description of it at all? I know it is too late for us to search it out for ourselves. This is a separate house? It is not an apartment?

MR. NESSEN: I have only been there once, and that was last night when he arrived, and it was dark. Can't the protective pool that went there with him this morning and that was given an opportunity to take pictures and so forth describe it to you? They are on their way back from the golf course now.

Q Ron, can you tell us who the President did talk to this morning? You say you are not sure if it was Kissinger.

MR. NESSEN: I think I would probably not like to go into the details of who he talks to.

Q How much time is he spending on ---

MR. NESSEN: He is spending what is required to deal with the situation.

We will have a lid now until we depart tomorrow morning, but we will be around this afternoon for any other questions.

END (AT 1:36 P.M. PDT)